

**Conference on Effectively Restoring Ecosystems
22-24 August 2000, St. Louis, Missouri**

BACKGROUND

Session: Breakout 5a

Topic: Environmental Planning Needs

Moderator: Bo Smith, CESAJ

Recorder: Cheryl Smith, CECW-PG

Panelists:

- Candy Gorton, CENWO
- Marty Hathorn, CESWF
- Jeff Laufle, CENWS
- Bo Smith, CESAJ
- Bill Hubbard, CENAD
- Mark Colosimo, CENAB

Objective: To articulate major concerns and issues facing environmental staff.

Description: Bo Smith opened the session with a theme-setting presentation on changing environmental attitudes within the Corps. A panel discussion followed, with traditional Environmental Branch Missions being the focus of presentations and discussions. The session concluded with an open facilitated discussion and prioritization of a list of key issues needing attention with the agency.

HIGHLIGHTS

Panel Discussion: Traditional Environmental Branch Missions

Each member of the panel on was asked to identify:

- a. where they are in their organization.
- b. what is working well.
- c. what they would like to change.

Bo Smith, CESAJ

- a. Chief, Environmental Branch, Planning Division. The Division has four branches: Plan Formulation, Economics, Environmental and Ecosystem Restoration.
- b. Database for each project that lays out promises and requirements related to the environment.
- c. Lack of value from FWCA reports. Procedure is set in a way that the FWS report information comes in at the same time the project report is ready.

Candy Gorton, CENWO

- a. Chief, Environmental and Economics Section in the Planning Branch of the Planning, Programs and Project Management Division (P3MD). There are collateral duties in Project Management.

- b. The way junior people are introduced to the job. It takes a long time to learn the job. New employees are teamed up with a Senior person on projects in a type of mentoring relationship. We have brought courses to Omaha rather than send them away (Cumulative effects, Environmental Justice, Advanced Topics in Environmental Impact Assessment and Traditional Cultural Properties; i.e., the NHPA, Section 106 process)
- c. Reorganization has not gone well. There has been too much but we still do the same thing. Cultural Resources is under-funded. Acquiring and maintaining technical expertise is another problem.

Marty Hathorn, CESWF

- a. Chief, Environmental Resources Branch, Environmental Division. The Branch has two sections, Cultural Resources and Environmental Planning. The Division has four branches; Environmental Resources, Regulatory, Environmental Design and Evaluations (Economics, Master Planning, and GIS). There is no “Planning” organization *per se* within the District to point to.
- b. In spite of organizational structure (no Planning organization), the District has embraced multi-objective planning, with all current studies emphasizing non-structural flood damage reduction, ecosystem restoration, open-space, recreation, water quality; etc., from a watershed perspective.
- c. The Corps has lost its institutional way of planning; it has lost its planning focus and is not “growing” new planners. Planning Associates no longer exists and there is no Planner Orientation. This is especially critical at a time when the mission has changed to the point where following a sound planning process is essential.

Jeff Laufle, CENWS

- a. Environmental Resources Section, PPMD. The section has biologists, wetlands scientists, Cultural Resources Specialists, and geologists. Section personnel have become PMs for some ecosystem restoration projects, which has worked well.
- b. Monitoring has gone well. However, we have concerns with the 1% cap on mitigation for operating projects.
- c. For things that need to be changed:
 - We need to be able to revisit operating projects for mitigation if new information or circumstances warrant it, and the Endangered Species Act has a “hammer” for working with Operations.
 - FWCA and (Transfer Fund Agreement) is a concern. There is a need for FWS to be involved in planning but there are contracting and technical realities.
 - Ecosystem Restoration needs to be added to the HQ web page.

Bill Hubbard, CENAE

- a. Chief, Environmental Section, Engineering and Planning Division,

- b. Little Harbor is a project we are proud of. It started with an impact to 22 acres of submerged aquatic vegetation and was reduced to 5.5 acres after 5 years of negotiations.
- c. I consider a failure to be maintenance dredging environmental impacts. Compliance with the O&M Federal Standard does not adequately address environmental impacts. If something is a navigation feature, it is not a resource. Another area of concern is how NEPA compliance is accomplished. It should all be in one group rather than let Operations do their own.

Mark Colosimo, CENAB

- a. Environmental Policy Advisor. Support for Others and Plan Formulation, Planning Division. Receive all studies related to Civil Works. Separate from PPMD, Engineering, etc.
- b. The District has a lot of different types of Ecosystem Restoration projects and activities.
- c. We have problems with staffing; i.e., having staff that can carry out the types and diversity of projects. We have well skilled specialists. There is also a problem with volume. Traditional staff needs to be funded.

In closing, the audience was asked if anyone had anything to add. The following comments were made:

- Pat Cagney, Seattle District – We have a large emergency management staff. When they are not fighting floods we use them to do small projects. They do the construction management using equipment rental contracts.
- George Hart, Seattle District – Dredging projects are based on how old EIS is, we revisit them periodically. A supplemental EIS is developed to see what has changed over the years. (Bo Smith commented that EISs needs sunset provision.)
- Jim Randolph, Tulsa District – We have EIS's for 30 year old operating projects. Some current activities were never thought of when they were written. We get them in budget cycles. We place a higher priority at looking at EISs (ERGO).

Key Issues Needing Agency Attention

Bo Smith introduced this portion of the session by providing a preliminary list of issues. The audience was requested to add issues. After discussion some were combined and the final list prioritized. The list of key issues is provided below, followed by the topics recommended for HQ action.

Key Issues

Votes	Topic
All	Capability (includes all additional topics below marked with *)
19	CAP funding
15	Monitoring after construction

- 15 Policy resolution on non-standard estates
- 9 Cumulative Impacts
- 9 Invigorate H&H and Geotech on restoration projects
- 6 CAP program; in-kind services
- 5 Consultation with Indian Tribes
- 2 Central group for all NEPA compliance
- 2 FWCA needs updating
- 1 Environmental Branch - integrate with PM?
- 1 ESA funding
- 1 Overstepping/expanding scope/moving targets by agencies
- 0 Conflicting missions
- 0 Dam Removal – Guidelines?
- 0 Environmental Justice examples
- 0 Mitigation for restoration projects
- 0 NAGPRA
- 0 Performance measures - real world examples
- 0 Value/caps on LERRD values
- Additional Topics**
- ER 200-2-2 update
- * Developmental exchange with other agencies
- * Interdisciplinary jobs - all of them
- * Mentoring Program
- * No journeyman category
- * Staff - got enough?
- * Strong Planner Training
- * Training, mentoring, aging, and corporate memory
- * Work force problems; losing skilled workers

Topics Recommended for HQ Action

Capability

The number one issue of concern. This includes the issues related to sufficient number of staff, developmental assignments, breadth of disciplines, mentoring, no journeyman category, strong planner training, retaining skilled staff, mentoring, aging and corporate memory. Individuals interested in working on this topic include:

Candy Gorton, Omaha District
 George Hart, Seattle District
 Jennifer Parris, Mobile District
 Traci Clever, Buffalo District
 Lauri Ortiz, Buffalo District

Section 206 and 1135 Projects

Is HQ making enough noise that we need up to 25 million a year. We have lost control over the projects chosen. Construction commitments and congressional limits for FY01 exceed 25 million. Statutory limit needs to be raised.

Monitoring after construction

We don't do it. Small projects, monitoring whittled down to too little. Restoration science is too uncertain. Are we meeting criteria of success? What do we do if we need to go back? Section 216 Route is available (design deficiency).

Non-standard Estates

Sponsors need answers on what government rights would be. Estimating value guidance. Change fee simple mindset.

Invigorate H&H

Bottleneck for projects, miss schedules and budgets. Have a few people but more work. Miscommunication through stovepipes to consider engineering and design constraints and environmental needs. Hurts sponsors. Focused on flood control. H&H dealing directly with FWS and not telling District people. Bioengineering techniques vs. standard engineering. What use can/should be made of Rosgen (applied fluvial geomorphology) method?

People interested in working on this topic:

Mark Harberg, Albuquerque District.

Cumulative Effects

People interested in working on this topic:

Jim Randolph, Tulsa District

CAP funding for new starts

Consultation with Tribes